

Liberty without Licentiousness:

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OR, A

DISCOURSE

To Evince the

REASONABLENESS

OF

Every Christian's judging for Himself

IN

RELIGIOUS MATTERS.

By a Well-wisher to Truth and Liberty.



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PAGE 12. Line 25. insert, *that.* p. 21. l. 24. dele, *on the contrary Supposition.* p. 22. l. 14. after *Lord's Day,* insert, *or Sabbath.* p. 29. l. 5. read, *and there have been great Numbers* — p. 35. l. 17. instead of *it is,* read *is it.* p. 47. dele, *of them.* p. 50. l. 31. dele, *the Sense of.* p. 54. l. 9. instead of *insufficient,* read *sufficient.* l. 39. instead of *no,* read *to an.* p. 59. l. 17. dele, *since.*



A
DISCOURSE
OF
CHRISTIANS Judging for themselves
IN
RELIGIOUS MATTERS.



I CORINTH. X. 15.

*I speak as to wise men: judge ye what
I say.*

INTRODUCTION.



IN these words, the Apostle addresses himself, in very respectful terms, to the *Corinthians*, to whom he wrote; whereby he took an effectual Course to engage their Attention to what he was about to offer. He gives them the respectful Title of *Wise Men*, and refers what he is about to

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say, to their Judgment. He gives them here the respectful Title of Wise Men; I speak, says he, as to wise men, i. e. to Men well skill'd in the Myſteries of Chriſtianity; to Men of Judgment and Underſtanding in the Affairs of Religion. A Skill in theſe Matters gives Perſons the faireſt Title to this Character: Perſons indeed are denominated wiſe Men, from their Skill in ſeveral Arts and Sciences; thus Perſons that are ſkill'd in the Art of Governing States and Kingdoms, are term'd wiſe States-Men; Perſons ſkill'd in the Art of Navigation, wiſe Pilots; Perſons ſkill'd in the Arts of Traffick and Merchandiſe, wiſe or prudent Trades-Men. A Skill in any of the Affairs of Life, whereby Perſons are able to conduct them to the attaining ſome valuable End, entitles them to this Character: But certainly nothing gives a Perſon ſo clear a Title to this Character, as a Skill in Divine Matters, whereby Perſons are enabled to conduct themſelves aright in the Affairs of Eternal Salvation; this is Divine Religious Wiſdom, whereas a Skill in all other Matters, can only be term'd, Worldly Wiſdom, or, *the Wiſdom of this World*: Now the former is as much preferable to the latter, as the Affairs of another World are of a more important concern than the Affairs of this, and as the attaining a bleſſed Eternity is a more valuable End than attaining any of the Secular Advantages of this vain and tranſitory Life. A Skill in Divine Matters, if it be attended with a ſuitable Practice, is the trueſt Wiſdom, and indeed if it be not, it is utterly unworthy this Character; it is not a bare knowledge of religious Matters, that entitles Perſons to the Character of Wiſe, in a religious Senſe, ſince this alone is not ſufficient to attain the great End of Religion, viz. Eternal Happineſs; in order hereto, it muſt be accompanied with a correſpondent Behaviour,

haviour, which if it be, this great End will be attained; *if ye know these things*, says our Saviour, *happy are ye if ye do them*; those are the wise Persons who conduct themselves aright to the obtaining this great and valuable End. That there were such amongst the People of *Corinth*, to whom the Apostle wrote, we have no reason to doubt. As the Apostle gave those to whom he wrote, the respectful Title of wise Men, *so he refers himself to their Judgment in the Matters whereof he wrote*; *Judge ye what I say*. There is a just connection betwixt the one and the other; seeing they were Men of Wisdom, they were by this means qualified to judge of what he said: Those that are so wise as to know and do God's Will, are the most proper Judges of religious Matters. Those that have a Probity of Mind disposing them to do the Will of God, are the most likely to form a right Judgment in Divine Matters; which agrees to what our Saviour asserts, *John vii. 17. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self*. I only observe this from the connection betwixt the respectful Title, and the Advice here given by the Apostle; it is the latter I design as the Subject of this Discourse. The Apostle was so fully perswaded of the equity and reasonableness of what he said, that he freely appeals to the Judgment of those to whom he wrote, yea, he is desirous they would examine those things that were the matter of his writing to them: *Judge ye what I say*. He allows the Christians, to whom he wrote, a Judgment of *Discretion*, tho' not of *Authority*; the former he allows all Christians, and the latter is more than belongs to any.

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Observ. It belongs to every Christian to judge for himself in religious Matters. When I say, Judge for himself, it is evident I intend hereby, that Judgment of *Discretion*, which every Christian may and ought to use in order to his discerning Truth from Error, for the Direction of his own Conscience, and the Regulation of his own Practice: It is thus styl'd in contradiction to that *Judgment of Authority* whereby one Man pretends to judge of religious Matters for another, and to impose upon this other his Sense of Things, which I shall have occasion to shew belongs to no Man, nor Body of Men, and which if it did, would quite overthrow that *Judgment of Discretion*, which according to the Fundamental Principles of Protestants, is inherent in every private Christian.

In order to clear and prove the aforesaid Observation, I shall proceed in this Method.

I. I shall shew what is imply'd in every Christian's Judging for himself, in Religious Matters.

II. What is denoted thereby.

III. Evince the Reasonableness thereof.

IV. Obviate some Objections made against it,

And ult. draw some Inferences from it.

Cap. I. I. Let us consider *what is imply'd in every Christian's Judging for himself in Religious Matters*. Now this seems to imply, his admitting the Scriptures to be the Rule of this Judgment, and the Exercise of his own Reason, in order to the forming it.

Sect. 1. It implies his *admitting the holy Scriptures as the Rule of this Judgment.* As judging implies that there be a Rule to judge by, so when we speak of Christians judging in Matters of Religion, it is evidently imply'd, that the Scriptures are this Rule: These having been own'd by the Professors of Christianity, in all the Ages of it, as the infallible Rule of their Faith and Practice, tho' by some, in these latter Ages, they have been treated as no other than a partial Rule. Indeed, before these are admitted as the Rule of Judgment, it concerns Persons to enquire into their Divine Authority, and to judge for themselves in this respect: If we take this important Matter upon trust, or herein slavishly rely upon the Judgment of others, upon what better Grounds do we go in believing the Scriptures to be of Divine Inspiration, than they who believe the *Alcoran* to be divinely inspired? Upon the same Grounds, in case our Lot had been cast in those Countries, where the *Alcoran* is received with a veneration, equal to what we Christians profess to have for the Bible, we should have paid the same venerable regard to it; we ought therefore in this Matter, to judge for our selves, by enquiring into the Reasons for the Belief of Christianity, and the Divinity of those sacred Writings, which contain this holy Religion. As our being reasonable Creatures renders us capable Subjects of Religion, so it capacitates us for enquiring into the Grounds of it. The same reason that renders us capable of understanding the holy Scriptures, and regulating our Sentiments and Practices by them, renders us capable at least in some degree and measure of judging with respect to their Divine Authority. And as we are capable of making this Enquiry, so I am very well satisfied this Matter will bear

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bear the Test of the strictest Examination. The Dispensers of that Religion contained in the Scriptures, neither need nor do desire Persons to take this Religion upon trust, or to believe the Divine Authority of these Writings, upon their or any other Man's word, because they are perswaded that this Religion, and the Writings which contain it, will evidently appear Divine to those that make a strict and impartial Examination into the Matter. It belongs to the Dispensers of a false Religion to forbid Persons examining into the Evidences upon which it is built; such a method as this gives too great ground of suspicion: Should any Christians forbid others to examine into the Divine Authority of those Scriptures which contain the Religion they profess, they wou'd hereby cast an unworthy reproach upon these Sacred Writings: It is an honour due to the Holy Scriptures, to press Persons to examine into their Authority, before they admit them as the Rule of their Faith, since hereby their Truth and Divinity wou'd be rendred conspicuous; is it not more for their honour to believe them to be of Divine Inspiration, because they evidence themselves to be so, than only because Men tell us they are so? And as this Method tends to the Honour of the Scriptures, so it is likely to have a good effect upon those that take it, since it tends to produce a solid, lasting, and influential perswasion of Mind, with regard to their Divinity: When I say therefore, that a Christian's judging for himself in Matters of Religion, implies his admitting the Holy Scripture, to be the Rule of this his Judgment, I do not intend hereby, that it is any Person's duty to take this Matter for granted without examination; he ought doubtless to judge for himself in this Affair as well as in any other; I only suppose his belief of the Divine Authority of the Scriptures,
which

which is no unreasonable Supposition in any that wear the Name of Christians, and without which they have no right to this Name: Now we are speaking of Christians judging for themselves in religious Matters; the Divine Authority of the Scriptures being own'd, it is necessary that these be admitted as the Rule of Judgment in religious Matters.

Señ. 2. It implies in the next place the exercise of his own Reason in order to the forming of this Judgment. A Person can no more be supposed to judge for himself, either in religious Matters, or any other, without the exercise of his own Reason, than he can be supposed to see any visible external Objects without the use of his bodily Eyes. Reason is our discerning Faculty; as it renders us proper Subjects of Religion, so it capacitates us for distinguishing betwixt Truth and Falshood, and consequently of judging for our selves in religious Matters. Reason is not properly the Rule or Standard whereby Christians are to judge of all religious Matters; this place must be assigned to the Holy Scriptures, which contain a plenary Revelation of God's Mind and Will; it is only the Faculty whereby we are to judge of this Rule, and without the exercise whereof, it is impossible for us to form a Judgment, either with regard to this Rule, or any other, either with regard to Matters of a religious nature, or any other Matters.

Cap. 2. II. Gen. I proceed to shew what is denoted by a Christian's judging for himself in religious Matters. *Now this seems to denote a serious endeavour to understand the Sense of Scripture; a sincere examining all Matters of Religion hereby; and the giving our assent to Matters, according as we find them*

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them to be contained in, or agreeable to this divine Rule.

Seet. 1. It denotes a serious endeavour to understand the Sense of Scripture. It is doubtless the Sense and Meaning of Scripture, that is the Rule in Matters of Religion; the words of Scripture are of no other use, than as they serve to convey this to our Minds; we properly therefore judge for our selves, when we use our best endeavours to find out this. He that never enquires at all into the Sense of Scripture, can scarce be said to form any Judgment at all in religious Matters, and consequently cannot be said to judge for himself herein. He that yields an implicit assent to the Sense put upon Scriptures by others, instead of judging for himself, does blindly submit to the Judgment of others: That Christian only can be said to judge for himself, in the Affairs of Religion, that seriously enquires into the Sense of Scripture, without yielding an implicit assent to the Interpretations of others.

Seet. 2. It denotes a sincere examining all Matters of Religion by the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures being the Rule in religious Matters, it is certain that nothing is, or properly can be, a Matter of Religion, but what is some way or other contained herein; what is either expressly mention'd herein, or conformable hereto: To judge for our selves therefore in religious Matters, is to bring all Doctrines and Practices, of a religious kind, to this Rule to be examin'd by it; to try whether they are contain'd in it, or conformable to it: Whosoever does this, may be said to judge for himself, whereas he that swallows down Doctrines taught by Men, and complies with Rules of Life laid down

down by these, without comparing either the one or the other, with the unerring Rule of God's Word, in order to see whether they are contained herein, instead of judging for himself, does yield a blind submission to the Judgment of others.

Sect. 3. It denotes the giving our assent to Matters, according as we find them to be contain'd in, or agreeable to this divine Rule. Judging certainly denotes an Act of the Mind, whereby we yield or withhold our assent to things, according as they appear to us; without doing this, we cannot be said to judge for our selves in religious Matters. The two former Acts which we have spoken to, and which are necessary for Christians, in order to their judging for themselves in religious Matters, are in order to this; they are in order to a Christian's giving his assent to whatever Doctrines and Practices he finds contained in the Scriptures, or agreeable to them, as to withhold it from whatever is not so: They that do this, without being byass'd by the Sentiments and Opinions of Men, may be said to judge for themselves; whereas to yield our assent to Doctrines and Rules laid down by Men, without apprehending their agreeableness to this Divine Rule, is not to judge for ourselves in Matters of Religion, but to submit to the Judgment of others, and that whether the Doctrines and Rules we assent to be agreeable to the Rule or no.

Cap. 3. III. Gen. I proceed now to evince the Reasonableness of every Christian's judging for himself in Religious Matters. I shall offer some Reasons why Christians should practise this Advice of the Apostle. The perspicuity and clearness of the Rule we are to judge by, the character we sustain, the absurdity of letting others judge for us, and granting others
C *such*

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such a right, the necessity we still lye under of judging for our selves, may help to evince the reasonableness of this practice.

SECT. 1. 1. Reas. The perspicuity and clearness of the Rule we are to judge by, may be esteem'd one reason why Christians should judge for themselves in religious Matters.

It is certain that God has given us a Rule sufficiently clear in all things necessary to be believed and done in order to Salvation: I do not say that the Holy Scriptures, which are our Rule, are clear in all things contained in them, but they are so in all things of a necessary nature in order to Salvation; and in things of another nature, there cannot be said to be any necessity, either of a Person's judging right himself, or of any other Person's judging for him. In things of a necessary nature, the Rule is so clear, that every sincere searcher may come to the knowledge of them; the contrary Supposition, as it reflects upon the Divine Goodness, and the Blessed Spirit, the Author of this Rule, so it contradicts the Holy Scripture, and plain Matter of Fact: *It reflects upon the Divine Goodness.* Christians are oblig'd to believe those things that are necessary, under the Penalty of everlasting Misery: But what a reflection must it be upon the Goodness and Mercifulness of the Divine Nature, to suppose Persons under so great a Penalty, obliged to assent to what is darkly and dubiously proposed? so darkly and dubiously, as that a sincere Searcher may not be able to understand the same, without which it is not possible for him to give his assent. This Supposition likewise *reflects upon the Blessed Spirit, the Author of this Rule.* If this Rule be not sufficiently clear in necessary matters, it must be because the Spirit of God, the
Author

Author of it, either could not or would not express his Mind more clearly to us: We cannot say the former, without incurring the Guilt of Blasphemy; and to say the latter, wou'd be to make the Blessed Spirit, in propounding a Rule to Men relating to their eternal Welfare, to use a Method which wou'd necessarily involve many sincere Searchers of this Rule in eternal Perdition. Again, this Supposition, *contradicts the plain and express Testimony of Scripture*, which does again and again assert it's own perspicuity and clearness. *Deut. xxx. 11, &c. for this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off, &c. v. 14. But the word is very nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it.* As Moses represents the Commandment, as not hidden from the Israelites, so the Psalmist represents it as enlightning the eyes, *Psal. xix. 8.* The same Psalmist elsewhere, represents the Word, as a Candle giving light to such as are desirous of walking by it; *Thy word, says he, is a Lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path, cxix. 105.* After the same manner do we find the Wise Man speaking, *Prov. 6. 23. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light.*

Now must not the Supposition of the Scriptures being dark and obscure, in matters of a necessary nature, directly contradict those Scriptures, which represent it as giving light sufficient for the guidance and direction of our Actions? Once more, does not the Supposition we are speaking of, *contradict plain Matters of Fact?* I think it is such, that things necessary have been embrac'd and assented to by all Christians, that have had any thing of a becoming reverence for the Holy Scriptures. Now if these things were not clearly revealed, is it not a little strange, that there should be such an unanimous harmony and agreement in these Matters,

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as there is even amongst those that greatly disagree in other Matters? I know indeed Christians have been very forward in all Ages to Anathematize one another; but this is no argument that they are not agreed in things of a necessary nature: It is indeed an argument that some Christians have judg'd some things necessary to Salvation, which others have not receiv'd; but it is no argument that the same things are made necessary in God's Word: From hence it follows, that there has not been an unanimity amongst Christians in defining those things that are necessary to Salvation, but not that there has been a disagreement with regard to what the Scripture has defined as necessary to Salvation. In these things there has been a great harmony amongst professing Christians that have differ'd in other matters, which is very strange, if these things were so darkly and dubiously propounded in the Sacred Writings, that sincere searchers might not perceive them. It seems therefore very evident, that God has given us a Rule sufficiently clear in all necessary matters, which may serve as one reason why Christians should judge for themselves; it appears from hence, both that they are capable of judging for themselves, and there's no necessity of any others judging for them. Those that are against Christian's judging for themselves in religious Matters, deny the perspicuity and clearness of the Rule, as being sensible, that granting this, they must act unreasonably in denying Christians a Right in the other respect.

Sect. 2. 2. Reas. The Character we sustain may help to evince the reasonableness of Christians judging for themselves. As reasonable Creatures we are capable of judging for our selves, as Christians we are requir'd to do it; as Protestants we in effect profess to do

it, and as accountable Creatures we are strictly obliged hereto.

1. *We are reasonable Creatures, and as such capable of judging for our selves.* As we have a Rule, which is the effect of the Inspiration of the Almighty, so the *Inspiration of the Almighty has given us Understanding*, whereby we are capable of judging of those things that are contain'd in it, and of discerning Truth from Error. As reasonable Creatures, we are capable Subjects of Religion, and those that are so, surely may be supposed capable to judge for themselves in Matters of Religion: Those that are capable of governing their Faith and Practice, by the Rule of Religion which God has given, may very well be supposed capable of finding the Sense of this Rule, at least in necessary Matters; of comparing Matters of Faith and Practice herewith, and also of giving their assent accordingly. I own indeed, some have far more improved Understandings than others, but the Rule given us is not only sufficiently clear, in necessary Matters, to Persons of improved Understandings, but to others, whose Understanding may be less improved, and it is very reasonable to think it should be so, since the Rule does as much respect these, as it does those of a more rais'd capacity, and does as much oblige these, under the Penalty of Condemnation, to believe all things necessary, as it does others. Now is it not fit that Christians use the Capacity God has endow'd them with, in an Affair that so much concerns them as that of Religion? Is not a Capacity bestow'd upon them in vain in this respect, if in Matters of Religion they resign themselves implicitly to the guidance of others? Can any answer it to God, in case they neglect doing what he has made 'em capable of doing, especially if through this neglect they fall
into

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into dangerous Mistakes in Matters of Religion? Don't those act unreasonably, who wou'd hinder their fellow Christians from doing what God has made them capable of doing?

2. *We are Christians, and as such requir'd to judge for our selves in religious Matters.* As we are capable, so God has made it our Duty to judge for our selves in these Matters: Whatever is denoted by any Christian's judging for himself, is manifestly every Christian's Duty. Particularly can it be question'd, whether it be not every Christian's Duty to use *serious endeavours to understand the Sense of the Scriptures*, which God has given him as the Rule of his Faith and Practice? how can this End be answered without these Endeavours? are not all expressly enjoyn'd by our Saviour to *search the Scriptures*, John v. 39. and does not the Apostle Paul require all to let the *word of Christ dwell richly in them in all wisdom*? Col. i. 16. which cannot be without serious Endeavours to understand the Sense hereof: Does not the same Apostle exhort the *Corinthians*, not to be *children in understanding*? 1 Cor. xiv. 20. What can this mean, unless in understanding the Sense of Scripture? and does not this Apostolical Injunction respect all Christians? Again, can it be questioned, whether it be not every Christian's Duty to *examine all Matters of Religion by this infallible Rule*? are we not expressly required not to take Doctrines on trust without Examination? *Prove all things*, says the Apostle, *hold fast that which is good*, 1 Thess. v. 21. *Believe not every Spirit*, says St. John, *but try the Spirits, whether they be of God*, 1 John iv. 1. Are we not enjoyn'd by our Saviour, to take heed of false Prophets? which doubtless implies our trying and examining their Doctrines, Matt. vii. 15. And does not the Author to the *Hebrews* require Christians

stians to have their Senses exercised to discern good and evil? Heb. v. 14. Now if it be the Duty of Christians to try and examine whatever Doctrines of Religion they receive, the Rule whereby this is to be done, must doubtless be the infallible Rule of God's Word. *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,* Isa. iii. 20. Once more, can it be question'd, whether it is our Duty to assent to Matters, according as we find them contain'd in or agreeable to this Rule? Can this be question'd by any that own the Divine Authority of the Scriptures, and look upon them as the sole Rule of the Faith and Manners of all Christians? tho' it is not our Duty always to assent to whatever others tell us is contained in Scripture, or agreeable to it, since they may possibly be mistaken; for which reason it is necessary that we examine our selves, yet certainly it is to assent to what we our selves apprehend is contained therein, or agreeable thereto; I grant indeed we may be mistaken as well as others, but then we are not oblig'd to pay the same obsequious regard to the mistaken Consciences of others as those of our own. Thus it appears, that Christians lye under an indispensable Obligation, in point of Duty, to judge for themselves in Matters of Religion; they cannot neglect to do this, without a manifest defiance to the Divine Authority. Christians lye under such an Obligation, to judge for themselves in these Matters, as no Authority upon Earth can free them from, and which it must be Wickedness in any to offer to disannul.

3. *We are Protestants, and as such do in effect profess to judge for our selves in religious Matters.* We are not only oblig'd to judge for our selves upon the account of our being reasonable Creatures, and so capacitated for it, upon the account of our being

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being Christians, and so required to do it, as appears from what has been said, but also upon the account of our Character as Protestants. This Principle of Christians judging for themselves is the Fundamental Principle of Protestants consider'd as such, and that upon which a Reformation from the gross Errors of Popery was built. Had not Persons enquir'd into the Sense of Scripture, and examined Doctrines by it, all the Errors and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome* must have remain'd in such Kingdoms where Popery was the establish'd Religion, in as much force as they do at this Day in many Popish Countries, where they do not indulge Persons this liberty of judging for themselves; but instead hereof oblige them to submit to the Judgment of the Church; where instead of permitting Persons to enquire themselves into the Sense of Scripture, they oblige them to yield an implicit assent to the Sense which the Church affixes to it, instead of suffering them to bring Doctrines to the unerring Rule of God's Word, to be tried by it, they force them to swallow down whatever Doctrines the Church establishes. These Methods, whereby the Popish Religion is supported, directly contradict the Principle we are considering, and had these been adhered to, it is impossible there should have been any Reformation at all. The glorious Reformation from the Errors of the *Romish* Church, ow'd its birth to Christians assuming a Liberty to do what they had an undoubted Right to do, *i. e.* Judge for themselves in Religious Matters, and which if they had no Right to do, they had no Right to enter their Protest against the many Errors in Doctrine and Practice introduc'd by that Apostate Church. In case therefore it be reasonable for Protestants to act suitably to this their Character, they ought certainly to

2
judge

judge for themselves in religious Matters, in not doing this, they abandon the very Principle upon which the Reformation from Popery was built, which is very shameful in all that make a Profession of the reformed Religion. Those Protestants, who either deny their fellow Protestants a liberty to judge for themselves, or neglect to use it themselves, herein act like those of the *Romish* Communion, but so much worse, inasmuch as they act thus in contradiction to their own profest Principles consider'd as Protestants.

4. *And lastly, we are accountable Creatures, and as such obliged to judge for our selves in religious Matters.* It is an undoubted Truth, that every Christian must hereafter give an account of himself to God, Rom. xiv. 12. and if so, doubtless every Christian ought to judge for himself now. Every Christian is accountable to God for his Faith and Practice, for the Doctrines he believes, and the Actions he does, and if so, certainly it concerns him to judge for himself, with regard to Matters of Faith and Practice. The Scriptures, as they are the present Rule of the Faith and Practice of all Christians, so they will be the future Rule of their Judgment, and if so, certainly it concerns all Christians so far to judge for themselves, as to enquire into the Sense of this Rule, and to examine all Matters of Religion hereby. In case indeed we were hereafter to be judged by any Mens Interpretation of this Rule, or by the Doctrines of any particular Men, in this case there would be no necessity of enquiring our selves into the Sense of this Rule, or of examining all Doctrines by it; in this case it would doubtless be our Duty to yield an implicit assent to such Interpretations and such Doctrines as were to be the Rule of our future Judgment: But wou'd it not be an instance of the greatest Arrogancy in

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any to say, that their fellow Christians must be judged in the Great Day by their particular Interpretations of Scripture, or by their particular Doctrines, any farther than these are found to agree with the Holy Scripture? Which whether they do or no, can be known no otherwise than by comparing them with this Rule, and this every Christian, that must answer for himself in the Day of Judgment, has both a Right to do, and is highly concern'd to do. In case any Men cou'd answer for us hereafter, we might then allow them a liberty to judge for us now; in this case we might yield an implicit assent to the Sense they put upon Scripture, or to whatever Doctrines they would have us to believe; but since the Supposition is false and absurd, so is the Consequence built upon it, or the Inference deduced from it: Since none can answer for us in the Day of Accounts, but we must answer for our selves, it concerns us, instead of depending upon the Judgment of others, to judge for our selves. If we our selves must be rewarded or punished for Matters of Faith and Practice hereafter, shou'd we not judge for our selves now? Let our Faith be never so right, can we think it will be rewarded in the great Day, if it has been only an implicate assent to what some others have told us in a case wherein we ought to have judg'd for our selves but neglected to do it? But in case we are drawn into dangerous Errors, through our yielding an implicit assent to the Judgment of Men, will our so doing render us blameless in the Day of Accounts, and exempt us from the righteous Judgment of God? If God has made us capable of judging for our selves, and required us to do it, shall we not be answerable to him for our neglect? Will they, upon whose Judgments we depended, be able to bear us out
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for those Errors and Mistakes we were drawn into through a blind submission to their Judgments, and a faulty neglect of using our own? We have a *Master in Heaven*, to whom we must, e're long, stand or fall; and since, at his tribunal, it will be of no avail to us, that we have depended upon this Man's Judgment, or that Man's, any farther than as this agrees with the perfect Rule which he has given us; does it not concern us, instead of slavishly depending upon the Judgments of others, seriously to enquire into this Rule, and to compare every thing with it? Should we be ready to fall in that Day, through our neglecting to do what God has made our Duty, I mean judging for our selves, will they, to whom we resign'd up our Judgments, be able to uphold us, and keep us from failing? I trust not. Now can any thing be more unreasonable, than for those that cannot answer for us hereafter, to usurp a Right to judge for us? *Who art thou* (says the Apostle) *that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth*, Rom. xiv. 4.

Seet. 3. 3. Reas. The absurdity of letting others judge for us in religious Matters, does farther evince the Reasonableness of every one's judging for himself. The absurdity of this will be manifest, if we do but consider, that none have a Right to do this, the Judgments of Men are various herein, and we are expressly requir'd not to yield to any Man's Authority in Matters of Religion.

1. None can have any Right to judge for us in these Matters. If any Man, or Body of Men, lay claim to a Right of this kind, the claim is manifestly unjust: This indeed is manifest from what has been already offer'd in proof of every Man's Right to judge for himself; for to suppose this,

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and yet to suppose that others have a Right to judge for any Man, is to suppose things directly repugnant and contradictory. If one Man has a Right to judge for another, then nothing can be plainer, than that this other has not a Right to judge for himself: If this Man has a Right to judge for himself, then nothing can be plainer, than that this other has not a right to judge for him. A *Judgment of discretion* in every Man, and yet an *authoritative Judgment* in some Men, whereby they have a Right to prescribe to others, in religious Matters, are utterly incompatable with each other. If any have an authoritative Judgment, with respect to me, in religious Matters, what becomes of my Liberty to judge for my self? Am I not, in this case, either necessitated to judge as they do, which quite destroys this Liberty, or else in case I judge differently, obliged to yield my assent to two different Judgments, *i. e.* oblig'd to believe the same thing to be true and false at the same time? For if those that are invested with this authoritative Judgment, judge such a thing to be true, I am oblig'd to believe it to be true; if notwithstanding this, I have a liberty to judge for my self, I may possibly judge the same thing to be false, which if I do, am I not obliged to believe it so? So that in this case, I am obliged to assent to a manifest contradiction, *viz.* that the same thing is true and false at the same time. But that no Person or Persons have a Right to judge for others, in religious Matters, appears from other Considerations, as from hence, none are endow'd with a *Spirit of Infallibility*, none are invested with *Authority over the Consciences* of their fellow Christians.

1. *None are endow'd with a Spirit of Infallibility.*
If any Man, or Body of Men, were posselt of
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such a Spirit, and could give sufficient proof hereof to their fellow Christians, we might yield them a Right to judge for their fellow Christians; tho' it is very certain, those that were possess'd of this Spirit of Infallibility, and gave sufficient proof hereof, did yet appeal to the Judgments of others, with regard to the Doctrines they taught them, and did call upon them to exercise their own Reason and Judgment in these Matters. I say in case any cou'd give proof hereof; for Infallibility itself is not sufficient to found a Right of this Nature upon, unless the Persons pretending to it gave sufficient proof hereof to those for whom they pretended to judge in religious Matters. Suppose a Person never so infallible in the Faith, yet as long as he gives no proof of his infallibility to me, he ought not to claim a Right to judge for me, neither can I be under obligation to submit to his Judgment: If his bare saying he was infallible gave him this Right, then any might claim it. Now if Persons may be supposed to be infallible, without having a Right to judge for their fellow Christians, much less can any be supposed to have a Right of this nature on the contrary Supposition, on the Supposition that they are not infallible, which is the plain Truth of the Case: tho' there have been, and are in the World, Persons that make pretences to an infallible Judgment in Matters of Faith, yet all these pretences are vain and groundless. None but such as were under the infallible guidance of God's Holy Spirit, can lay a just claim to an infallible Judgment in religious Matters, which has not been the case of any since the days of the Apostles. Neither Fathers nor Councils can lay a just claim hereto; as the former were fallible Creatures, so the latter were made up of such, and both the one and the other have been tax'd with several Errors, as well

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well as with contradicting each other; and their contradicting each other, is a manifest Evidence, not only of their Fallibility, but of the actual erring of one Side or the other, unless both parts of a Contradiction can be supposed to be true. The most celebrated Fathers of the Church have been tax'd with various Errors, and that even by those that have professed a great veneration for them. It were easy to produce instances hereof, in the most early Fathers of the Church, such as *Ignatius*, *Justin Martyr*, *Tertullian*, *Origen*, *Arnobius*, &c. Was it not a strange Error in the first of these, to call those Murderers of our Lord Jesus Christ, who fasted on the Lord's Day, the Passover-Sabbath excepted? Was not the second of these guilty of a great Mistake in asserting, that the Sun was originally plac'd in the Heavens in order to be ador'd? What shall we think of *Tertullian*, who held second Marriages to be unlawful, as well as disapproved of the Baptism of Infants? As for *Origen*, he has been accused of holding sundry Errors, particularly of believing that after a Term of Years, the Devils themselves should be saved. *Arnobius* maintain'd, that the Souls of Men were not immediately created by God, and that the Souls of wicked Men shall hereafter be annihilated. Shall we esteem Men that held such Tenets as these infallible? these liv'd in some of the early Ages of the Church, and those Fathers that liv'd in the subsequent Ages of Christianity, may be charg'd with Sentiments no less erroneous; and truly no wonder, when these are by all esteem'd to be less pure than the Ages that were nearest to the Times of the Apostles. And as Fathers can lay no claim to a Spirit of Infallibility, so neither can Councils: It will not be deny'd, but that both Heresy and Idolatry have been establish'd in their turns by these venerable

venerable Bodies of Men. And indeed whilst we own particular Persons to be fallible, it seems not a little strange to ascribe Infallibility to Councils, which are only a Collection of these: Unless Numbers can be supposed to confer the Priviledge of Infallibility, how is it possible that a Number of fallible Creatures met together, should hereupon commence infallible? Can the whole be infallible, if this whole be made up of fallible parts? As from the Errors maintain'd by Fathers, and those establish'd by Councils, it is very apparent, that neither one nor other can lay a rightful Claim to Infallibility; so this is very evident from their contradicting one another: There have been not only Fathers against Fathers, but Councils against Councils, witness the Council of *Nice* and that of *Ariminum*, the one of which establish'd the Doctrine of *Athanasius*, and the other the opposite Doctrines of *Arius*. Unless therefore we can believe the two opposite parts of a Contradiction to be true, we cannot ascribe Infallibility either to Fathers or Councils: Now if neither of these be infallible, where shall we find this glorious Priviledge? If we believe the Fathers, and those that liv'd in the purest Ages of the Church were fallible, shall we ascribe Infallibility to any of the later Doctors of the Church? Shall we exempt these from that liability to err, which we see some of the most celebrated Fathers were not free from? If we believe Councils in former Ages were fallible, as being compounded of fallible Persons, shall we ascribe Infallibility to any later Synods, Assemblies or Convocations, which are also made up of fallible Persons? No, no, this is a Priviledge that is not invested in any Mortal, *Let God be true, but every man a liar*. Now if none have an infallible Judgment in Matters of Religion, what Right can they
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be supposed to have to judge for others herein? They that lay claim to this Right may possibly err; now if they have that Right which they lay claim to, those for whom they judge must be oblig'd to believe an Error which is absurd.

2. As none are endow'd with a Spirit of Infalibility, so none are invested with Authority over the Consciences of their fellow Christians. Since it is very evident that religious Matters do respect the Consciences of Men, those that have a Right to judge for others in these Matters must be allow'd to have an Authority and Dominion over the Consciences of those for whom they judge: If this therefore belongs to no Man, nor any Body of Men, so neither does the other. The Consciences of Men seem to be alone subject to the blessed God; no Man can therefore pretend to exercise a Dominion, with respect to these, without a criminal invasion of the Divine Prerogative: How criminal must they then be, if they do that which denotes the exercise of such dominion, *i. e.* judge for them in matters of Faith? *Certain it is, none are possessed of an inherent Authority, over the Consciences of others; and certain likewise is it, that God has not authorized any to exercise such a dominion over their Consciences, as to judge for them in religious Matters. It is certain that none have any natural inherent Authority over the Consciences of others. None have a natural Right to exercise any Dominion in this respect: All Christians are alike Subjects in the Kingdom of the Redeemer, and as such, one cannot be suppos'd to have any Authority over the Conscience of another, no more than those that are Subjects in an earthly Kingdom, consider'd as such, can be supposed to have an Authority over their fellow Subjects. Whatever Authority one Subject can be supposed to have with regard to another,*
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it must be by Delegation and Commission from the governing Powers, and can extend no farther than such a Commission gives right to; so that it is a branch of the very same Authority, that is lodg'd in the Supreme Governing Powers: In like manner, whatever Authority one Christian can be supposed to have with regard to another in Matters of Religion, it must be by Delegation or Commission from Christ Jesus, who is sole King in the Church, which is his Kingdom, and can extend no farther than such a Commission gives Right; so that this Authority is not any different Authority from his, but really a Branch of his. No Christians therefore can be supposed to have a natural inherent Authority over the Hearts and Consciences of others; they cannot, if Christ be own'd to be King alone in his Church; if he alone be possessed of Dominion over the Hearts and Consciences of his Subjects: To suppose such a thing, wou'd be to set up a different Authority from his in his Kingdom; it wou'd be to pretend to reign herein, which certainly none of his Subjects have a Right to do; to make Pretences of this nature, wou'd be in effect to deny Christ to be alone King in his Church, and to pretend to share a Dominion with him over the Hearts and Consciences of his Subjects, which is a manifest invasion of his Prerogative, and tends both to diminish and debase his rightful Authority. *It is certain, in the next place, that God has not authorized any to exercise such a Dominion over others, as to judge for them in religious Concerns.* To judge for others, in these Concerns, is to exercise a Dominion over their Consciences, but such a Dominion God has no where authorized any to exercise; if he has, let such as lay claim hereto, produce their Commission; if they cannot, it may be fairly ask'd, by *what Authority*

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do they pretend to judge for others, and who gave them this Authority? Where is it signify'd in all God's Word, that one Person has an Authority to judge for another, or that some Christians have an Authority to judge for their fellow Christians in religious Concerns? Is there any Foundation for such an authoritative judging, to be met with in the Scriptures of Truth? Or are we there inform'd, with whom such an Authority as this is lodg'd? and yet both these things ought to be clearly made out, before we yield such an Authority to any. We ought to have it made evident from God's Word, that such an Authority is lodg'd somewhere, and also told with whom it is lodg'd: Supposing this former was made never so evident, yet if we were not inform'd as to the latter, we should still be at a loss about this Matter; we should not know to whom to yield this Authority: But alas, there are no footsteps either of the one or of the other, to be met with in all God's Word; which is very strange, in case God had intended that some shou'd have an Authority of judging for others. In case God had intended that such or such Persons shou'd be invested with this high Priviledge, it is strange that he shou'd not give some intimation of this in his Word, especially since an intimation of this kind, might have been an excellent expedient for putting an end to an infinite number of Disputes and Controversies amongst Christians.

2. *Secondly, As none have any Right to judge for others in religious Matters, so the Judgments of Men, in these Matters, have been very different, which farther shews the absurdity of allowing others to judge for us. Notwithstanding the harmony and agreement there has been amongst Christians, with regard to the essential Truths of Christianity, certain it is there has been, and is so great diversity*
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of Judgment, with regard to several Points of Religion; there have been and are different Interpretations given of several Texts of Scripture; there have been and are different Doctrines embrac'd by the greatest Professors of Christianity: So great a diversity of Judgment has there been in these Matters, that what some Christians have esteem'd as Errors, have been esteem'd by others, as no other than Fundamental Truths of Christianity, and this has been the source of those many Anathemas, which some angry Men have in all Ages thundred out one against another. Sometimes these Anathemas have been thundred out, when the Matter, about which Christians have differ'd one from another, has been very trifling; some Christians judging such and such things to be Fundamental Truths, which others look upon as Errors, and which, whether true or false, is of no great consequence to Christianity: Besides these, there have been different Judgments in Matters of Religion, which have not on either side been esteem'd as Fundamentals. The different Judgments that have been and are amongst Men, in Matters of Religion, is manifest from the several Distinctions that have been and are amongst the Professors of Christianity: Not to speak of the Distinctions amongst Christians in the former Ages of the Church, these latter furnish us with more than enough: Besides the distinction of Papists and Protestants, how many distinct Names are there to be found, even amongst these latter; such as *Lutherans, Calvinists, Arminians, Arians, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, Quakers, &c.* Now from the great diversity of Judgment there has been amongst Men, in Matters of Religion, we may argue the absurdity of admitting others to judge for us in these Matters: It is certain we cannot fall in with the different Judgments

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of those that may be ready to claim an Authority in this respect; this is as impossible, as it is to believe two opposite contradictory Propositions to be true; and since this is impossible, it instead of judging for our selves, we are for resigning up our selves to the Judgment of others, at what a loss must we needs be, whose Judgment to follow? The very same Reasons that may make us ready to resign to this or the other Man's Judgment, in the Affairs of Religion, may hold good with regard to the opposite Judgment of another. For instance; Are we willing to resign our selves to the Judgments of such, because they are Men of great Penetration and Learning? Why, for the same reason, we must submit to the quite opposite Judgment, since Persons of as great Penetration and Learning have been of an opposite Judgment. There have been Men of great account for Judgment and Learning, both amongst *Papists* and *Protestants*, amongst *Unitarians* and *Trinitarians*, *Arminians* and *Calvinists*, *Episcopalians* and *Presbyterians*, *Pædobaptists* and *Antipædobaptists*, &c. At this rate therefore we might as well list our selves under one of these denominations, as the other opposite, as well be *Papists* as *Protestants*. *Unitarians* as *Trinitarians*, *Arminians* as *Calvinists*, &c. Or are we willing to refer our selves to the Judgments of such, because they are Persons eminent for Piety and Virtue? Why! the very same reason must oblige us to submit to a quite opposite Judgment, since Persons of a quite opposite Judgment have been no less eminent upon these Accounts. There have been Men eminent for Piety, as well amongst the *Papists* as the *Protestants*, as well amongst the *Unitarians* as *Trinitarians*, as well amongst the *Remonstrants* as the *Contraremonstrants*, as well amongst the *Episcopalians* as the *Presbyterians*, as well amongst

mongst the *Lutherans* as the *Calvinists*, as well amongst the *Antipadobaptists* as the *Padobaptists*. Again, are we willing to submit without examination to such Judgments in religious Matters, because they are establish'd, and then have great numbers of such a persuasion? For the very same reason we ought to embrace quite opposite Sentiments, since these may be establish'd in other Countries, and entertain'd by as great a Number. Popery is the establish'd Religion of one Country, and Protestantism of another; Lutheranism is establish'd in some Countries, and Calvinism in others; Episcopacy in some Countries, Presbytery in others. If we are for resigning to the Judgments of Men, establish'd in the Countries where our Lot happens to be cast; then had our Lot been cast in *Spain* or *Italy*, or any other Popish Country, we must have been *Roman-Catholicks*; if in *Sweden*, and some parts of *Germany*, *Lutherans*; if in *Holland*, or in *Geneva*, *Calvinists*; if in *Scotland*, or *North Britain*, *Presbyterians*; and as it is here in *England*, or *South Britain*, we ought to be *Episcopalians*, or *Church of England Men*.

What reason then can we assign, for acquiescing in the Judgments of some Men, which may not as well be alledg'd for a blind submission to the Dictates of others? If Learning, Piety, Numbers may be urged, for our resigning up our Judgments to some Men, the very same Reasons may be urged for resigning them up to those of an opposite Perswasion.

Thirdly, We are required not to yield to any Man's Authority in religious Matters. So far are any from having a rightful Authority over the Consciences of their fellow Christians, that it is the Duty of all Christians, not to permit any to exercise an Authority in this respect. Our Lord has enjoin'd us expressly,

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preſſy, not to call any Father or Maſter here upon Earth, *Matth. xxiii. 8, 9, 10. But be ye not called Rabbi, for one is your Maſter, and all ye are brethren; and call no man your father upon earth, for one is your father which is in heaven, neither be ye called maſters, for one is your Maſter even Chriſt.* It cannot reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that our Lord does here forbid the uſe of theſe Titles of *Maſter and Father*; and *St. John* addreſſes himſelf to the Aged, with the Title of *Father*, *1 John ii. 13.* It's plain therefore, he here forbids his Diſciples both a pretending and ſubmitting to ſuch an Authority, ſignified by theſe Titles, as was an intrenchment on the Authority of God and Chriſt: So the reaſon here ſignified ſhews; call no Man your Father upon Earth, *for one is your Father which is in Heaven, Matt. x. v. 10.* neither be ye called Maſters, *for one is your Maſter even Chriſt*; and if ſo, the Prohibition here muſt reſpect an Authority in religious Concerns, an Authority over the Hearts and Conſciences of Men. The words *Rabbi, Father, Maſter*, as a learned Commentator upon the place obſerves, were Titles which the *Jews* were wont to give to their wiſe Men, the Fathers of Tradition, and Men of the greateſt Underſtanding in the Law of *Mofes*; and in giving them theſe Titles, they profeſſed a firm adherence to whatever Doctrines they taught; they as little doubted of the Truth of what any of theſe deliver'd, as they did of the Truth of what they were taught by the inſpir'd Writers: Some did aſſert, that the words of theſe Men were equal to the words of the Law, and more to be regarded than the words of the Prophets. *Maimonides* expreſſes himſelf thus, If a Thouſand Prophets, who were equal to *Elias* and *Eliſha*, bring one Interpretation, and a Thouſand and one wiſe Men produce one contrary to it, we muſt

must incline to the most, and be obliged rather to act according to the Sentence of these wise Men, than that of the Thousand Prophets. Christ therefore in forbidding the use of these Titles amongst his Disciples, must be supposed to forbid that Authority in Matters of Religion, which was ascrib'd by the *Jews* to those to whom these Titles were given. *Vid. Dr. Whitby in Locum.* In forbidding his Disciples to be call'd *Rabbi* or *Master*, he forbids their usurping an Authority over the Faith of others; in forbidding them to give the Titles of *Father* or *Rabbi* to others, he as plainly forbids their acknowledging such an Authority and Dominion in others. As none ought to affect these Titles, no not the Apostles themselves, since they are not Fathers of our Religion, as God our heavenly Father is; nor Masters of our Faith, as Christ Jesus the Lord their Master, and the Master of all Christians is; so we ought not to yield these Titles to any: We ought not absolutely to resign our selves in religious Matters to the conduct of any Man's Judgment. Christ Jesus alone has that Dominion over the Faith and Consciences of Christians, to which they ought to yield an absolute submission; *One is your Master, even Christ.* We ought not to assent to any Doctrines of Men, any farther than these contain the Mind of Christ, and whether they do so or no we ought to judge, if we do otherwise we make Men the Masters of our Faith, and in so doing we ascribe to them a far greater Authority than belongs to them, and at the same time derogate from that Authority which belongs to our heavenly Master. Christ Jesus is the only Master, to whom our Judgments are to be so absolutely resign'd, that whatever he enjoyns as Matter of Duty, we ought to comply with as just and reasonable, and whatever he teaches as matter of Doctrine,

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Doctrine, we ought to assent to as undoubtedly true, because coming from him; but such an absolute resignation of our selves, in the Affairs of Religion, is due to no Man, nor any Body of Men: Such a resignation as this to any Men, wou'd be to make them equally the Masters of our Faith with Christ, the doing whereof tends to a diminution of the Redeemer's Glory, as it is also at the same time, the ascription of an undue Glory to poor fallible Creatures. Thus it appears how absurd and unreasonable it is to let others judge for us in religious Concerns.

Seet. 4. Lastly, Granting others a right to judge for us in these Matters, we still lie under a necessity of judging for ourselves. It would be the height of folly to resign a Right of this nature to any that might lay claim to it; we must therefore judge for our selves with regard to this Right: Now in order to know that we are oblig'd to submit to such a one's determinations in religious Matters, it is necessary we examine those Scriptures, which give to some a right of judging, and oblige others to submit to their determinations: They that claim this Right, ought not to decide the Sense of these Scriptures, because their Right and Authority is now enquired after, and none ought to decide in their own Cause; nay, tho' they should do this, what wou'd it signify? since it can only oblige such as own the Authority, and consequently not such who are now enquiring into it. Persons we see therefore must judge for themselves with regard to the Sense of those Scriptures, which give to any a Right to judge for them: and thus it is apparent, that all Disputes in Matters of Religion, must at last issue and result in the determination of every one's private Judgment. Upon the Supposition,
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that others have a Right to judge and determine for us; yet it belongs to us to judge of this Right; and in so doing, we virtually determine all other Points of Religion; because when we have once judg'd that such Persons have a Right to determine for us in religious Matters, we are thenceforward to acquiesce in all their Determinations. If therefore we must judge for our selves, in a matter that virtually determines all the particular Points of Religion, is it not reasonable that we judge for our selves in these particular Points? Is it not manifestly as reasonable for us to judge for our selves in particular Points of Religion, as in an Affair that virtually determines them all? Is it not as reasonable for us to enquire into the Sense of those Scriptures, which by the Papists are said to support many of their Doctrines: Such as Transubstantiation, Merit, Purgatory, &c. or into the Sense of those Scriptures, which are said by Protestants to support other Doctrines believ'd in common by them, and the Roman Catholicks, such as the Doctrine of the Trinity, Original Sin, &c. and to give our assent to the one or other accordingly; as it is to judge for our selves with regard to the Sense of those Scriptures, which it is pretended give some a Right to judge for others, and which oblige others to submit to their Determination?

Cap. 4. IV. Gen. I now proceed to obviate some Objections made against this important Truth. Notwithstanding the Justice and Reasonableness of every Christians judging for himself in Religious Matters, this is a Truth that has its Adversaries; I wish I could say these were only to be found in the *Romish* Communion: I fear it has not a few amongst those that go under the

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Name of *Protestants*, tho' in wearing this Name, and opposing this Principle, it is certain they act a most shameful self-contradictory part, and very well deserve to be styl'd *Popish or Roman Catholic Protestants*. The opposition that is made to this Principle, I impute rather to Mens Lusts, and particularly to the Lust of Pride, or an Affectation of Dominion over the Consciences of others, than to any considerable Reasons and Arguments they can offer for the same. It is this Pride, or Affectation of Dominion over the Consciences of others, that occasions their seeking for Arguments wherewith to support it: Now the most considerable that I have met with, may be reduced to three or four Heads, such as the Obscurity of Scripture, the Incompetency of some to judge for themselves, the Right which others have to judge for them, and the Assertion of Scripture with regard to itself, that it is not of private Interpretation.

Seet. 1. Obj. The Holy Scriptures, the Rule of this Judgment, are obscure, upon which account every private Christian cannot be reckon'd sufficient for this task. Since these are dark and obscure, how incapable must many Persons be, of enquiring into their Sense, and bringing all Doctrines to them to be examin'd thereby? And that they are dark and obscure, they think sufficiently evident, both from St. Peter's saying, that in the Epistles of St. Paul, there are some things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction, 2 Pet. iii. 16. and also from the Practice of Writing Commentaries on the Scripture, in which there are very different Senses given of several Texts of Scripture.

Answ.

Answ. 1. The Scriptures are not obscure in things of a necessary nature; and if so, where's the Necessity that any lie under, either of not judging for themselves, or submitting to the authoritative Judgment of others?

That the Scriptures are not obscure in necessary Matters, enough has been already said to evince, when we shew'd, that the *contrary Supposition reflected both upon the Divine Goodness, and the Blessed Spirit the Divine Author of them, as well as contradicted express Testimony of Scripture, and plain Matter of Fact.* Neither is this Supposition, prov'd from the Scripture, alledg'd in the Objection, *1st Pet. iii. 16.* tho' the Apostle does speak of some things *hard to be understood*, in St. Paul's Epistles, yet how does it appear, that the knowledge of these things is necessary to Salvation? It is apparent from what follows, *viz. That the unlearned and unstable do wrest them unto their own destruction.* By the *ἀμαθεῖς*, here translated *unlearned*, some think we are to understand Men of an indocile Temper, Men indispos'd for Learning, as by the *unstable*, Men that are carried to and fro by every Wind of Doctrine. Now it is possible, that Men of such a Temper may wrest some Texts that do not contain a Sense necessary to be known in order to Salvation, so as to draw from them a Sense of very destructive consequence. Such pernicious Consequences may be drawn from these Texts misunderstood, as may produce Actions of a damnable Nature. Thus, as a learned Author observes, tho' it be not absolutely necessary to know the genuine Sense of those Words of our Saviour, *This is my Body*, yet a Person from misunderstanding them, may be brought to believe, that the Bread in the Sacrament is transubstantiated into the real Body

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of Christ, and from hence may be brought to pay religious Adoration to the Bread, which is an idolatrous, and consequently a damnable Act. Now this must be ascrib'd to the fault of those that thus pervert these Sacred Writings, and not to any fault in them, as tho' they were not clear in necessary Matters: And as what St. Peter says is no proof of the Scriptures obscurity in necessary Matters, so neither is the practice of writing Commentaries, in which we find different Senses given of several Texts. It is readily own'd, there are several things obscure in the Sacred Writings, and Commentaries may be of great use for casting light into them, but that these obscure places contain any Senses necessary to Salvation wants to be proved; or granting that some of them do it, it must be prov'd that these are not clearly reveal'd in other places of Scripture, before it can be inferr'd from hence, that the Scriptures are not clear in things necessary to be known: The same thing may be said with regard to the different Explications given in these Commentaries: Before this thing proves any thing to the purpose, for which it is alledg'd, it must be prov'd, that these different Explications respect things of a necessary nature, and also, that such things are not more clearly expressed in other places, about which there are no different Explications.

Answ. 2. Granting the Scripture to be obscure in necessary Matters, this does by no means destroy every Man's Right of judging for himself, or establish some Men's Right of judging for others. Indeed this is an Argument why every one should use the utmost care in forming a Judgment concerning things contain'd in Scripture, lest he shou'd be guilty of a mistake in things of a necessary nature; but why this

this should give some Men, that are neither infallible, nor authorized, a Right to judge for others, I cannot see; rather methinks, it is an Argument against relying on the Judgments of any fallible unauthorized Persons, and consequently of judging for our selves, since if we judge at all, we must either rely upon the Judgments of others, or judge for our selves.

Sett. 2. 2. Obj. Some Persons are not competent Judges in Religious Matters. Some lie under a sort of *natural incapacity*, being void of those Parts and Learning which seem requisite to enable Persons to form a Judgment in these Matters: How incapable must Persons of mean Parts, and a slender Education, be of judging of those Points of Religion that have been controverted by Persons of great Judgment and Learning? How unable must Persons, that are entire strangers to the learned Languages, be of judging concerning the Sense of a Book wrote in those Languages? And then as some lie under a natural incapacity, so there seem to be others that lie under a *moral incapacity*, as having their Minds darkned by Sin and Lust. How incapable must they be to judge of Divine and Spiritual Matters, whose understandings are darkned by habits of Sin, and *are alienated from the Life of God, through the blindness of their Minds?* *The natural Man, says the Apostle, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he perceive them, because they are spiritually discern'd, 1 Cor. ii. 14.*

Answ. To the First Part of the Objection, respecting such as lie under a sort of *Natural Incapacity*,

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1. *It is granted that all Men are not competent Judges of all Points of Religion, but then it is not necessary they should be able to judge of these.* There's no necessity that every private Christian should be able to form a clear Judgment touching several things that have been controverted, relating to the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Decrees of God, &c. Christians may very safely be ignorant of many Points of Religion, that have been canvassed by Men of Learning. The knowledge of these things cannot be said to be necessary to their eternal happiness; whatever is so, is deliver'd with that perspicuity and clearness, that every honest and unprejudic'd Person may see it in the Scriptures of Truth: We have reason to think that every Person that is a capable Subject of Religion, and sincerely seeks after the Truth, may see what is necessary to his happiness, and then as to other Matters, as to controverted Points, it is neither necessary that he should form a Judgment himself, neither is it necessary that he should herein depend upon, or submit to the Judgment and Determination of others.

2. *I own that it cannot be avoided, but that some Persons must in some cases depend upon the Fidelity of others.* Since all Christians are not skil'd in those learned Languages, in which the Scriptures were wrote, many must necessarily depend upon the Fidelity of those that have translated them into those Languages which they do understand, which must be acknowledg'd to be somewhat of an inconvenience with respect to every Person's judging for himself; but forasmuch as these Translations, whether of the Scriptures in general, or some particular parts of it, have been made by Persons that have entertain'd different Sentiments in religious Matters, they may be compar'd together;

gether; where they are found to agree, there's no room left for doubting of the Skill and Fidelity of the Translators; where they are found to differ, the examining the Reasons wherewith each defends his Version, may help to shew Persons which Translation is to be preferr'd.

In answer to the Second Part of the Objection, respecting Men's *Moral Incapacity*, this indeed is rather an Objection against the perspicuity and clearness of the Scripture, at least with regard to some Men, than any thing of an Argument against every one's Right to judge for himself; but since an Objection against the one is thought a sufficient reason against the other, we shall consider it; and do not scruple to affirm, that notwithstanding Mens Minds are darkned with Sin and Lust, this does not render them incapable of understanding the Sense of Scripture in necessary Matters: Persons may be capable of this, tho' they are destitute of the special illuminations of the Spirit of God; Persons may *know God's Will*, tho' they *do not do it*. It is true indeed, the Apostle says, *The natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God*, &c. but it does not follow hence, that Persons cannot, without the special influences of the Spirit, understand the Scriptures in necessary Matters, and that whether by the natural Man we understand the Sensualist as some do, or the Philosopher as others. Some by *natural Man*, in this place, understand the Man that is wholly devoted and enslaved to earthly things, and entirely taken up with the Concernments of this Life, like a brute Creature; now it is not said of these, that they cannot understand those Truths that are revealed to them; if they did not barely understand them, how could these things be said

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to be foolishness to them? How could they judge a Doctrine, which they knew not, to be foolish? It is here said, the natural Man receiveth not *ἡ δέχεται*, which does not signify a bare perception by our Understandings, but a reception by Faith, *Vid. Acts xvii. 11. James i. 21.* Now the sensual Man does not thus *receive the things of the Spirit of God*, not because he does not understand them, but because he judges them to be foolishness: He whose Mind is enslaved to sensual Indulgences, is apt to judge the spiritual Promises of the Gospel, and that Self-denial he is call'd to in order to his being interested in them, as no other than foolishness. Others by *natural Man*, in this place, understand the Man that makes use of nothing but Reason, and think the Apostle intends hereby the same with the Wise Man, the Disputer, the Philosopher, the Greek, of whom he speaks in the Context; now such a one cannot know the things of the Spirit of God by that Wisdom which alone he will be conducted by, because they are spiritually discern'd, or by the Revelation of the Spirit. The Apostle does not say, that this natural Man cannot understand these Revelations of the Gospel, when discover'd to him, but only that he cannot know them before they are discover'd by the Revelation of the Spirit; and that he will not then receive them, because they are not taught him, as the Wisdom of the World is, by deductions from Principles of Humane Reason. But granting a Moral Incapacity in some, to judge of religious Matters, I do not see how this either takes away their Right, or discharges them from the Obligation which they lie under of judging herein, *i. e.* of using their best endeavours to understand the Sense of Scripture, and examining Matters of religion by it:

I do not see how this gives any other Persons a Right to judge for them in these Matters, or obliges them to yield a slavish submission to their Judgments: Nay, do not those that lie under a moral incapacity to discern the Truths contain'd in Scripture (the necessary Truths therein contain'd) lie under the same incapacity of discerning any religious Matters, which their fellow Christians would oblige them to yield their assent to? And indeed this one Consideration is a sufficient Answer to any Argument brought from Men's incapacity to judge for themselves: Are Men capable of assenting to such and such Doctrines, which their fellow Christians would oblige them to assent to, and yet incapable of understanding the Sense of Scripture in things of a necessary nature? Can it be thought, that the latter requires a greater Capacity than the former? Can those that lie under an Incapacity of doing the latter, be judg'd to have a sufficient Capacity for the former? Are Men capable of assenting to some Doctrines, held by those of the Church of *Rome*, such as Transubstantiation, Purgatory, Merit, or others held in common by them, and many of the Reformed, such as the Doctrine of the Trinity, Original Sin, &c. and yet not capable of understanding the Sense of Scriptures in things of a necessary nature? Do not the necessary Truths of Religion, contain'd in Scripture, lie as level to the Capacities of Men, as some of the foremention'd Doctrines? If then it does not require a greater Capacity to understand the necessary Truths contain'd in Scripture, than to assent to many Doctrines, to which they that make this Objection would urge others to give their assent; how vain, absurd and trifling, must this Objection appear? Those that are incapable of un-

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derstanding the necessary Truths contain'd in Scripture, are doubtless incapable of assenting to many Doctrines, to which some Men would oblige their fellow Christians to assent; how absurd then must it be to make a pretended Incapacity, in the one case, an Argument to oblige them to that whereof they are equally incapable?

Seet. 3. 3. Obj. It is pretended that others have a Right to judge for us, and we are bound to acquiesce in their Determinations. God, say some, has constituted a visible and infallible Judge, in whose Judgment, concerning the Sense of Scripture, and Controversies in Religion, all are bound to acquiesce; tho' the Assertors hereof are not agreed who this infallible Judge is, some ascribing an infallible Judgment to the Pope, others to a general Council, others to a Pope acting in concert with such a Council: Again, it is the cry of many, we are to acquiesce in the Churches Determinations, which, they say, is stiled *the Pillar of Truth*.

Ans. It has been already prov'd, that none have this pretended Right: They that say, that God has constituted a visible and infallible Judge, in Matters of Faith, ought to give some Proof hereof; let them shew the Scriptures that make any mention hereof; till they do this, it is sufficient to deny the Assertion; Nothing of this kind is asserted in Scripture; and this Assertion does manifestly contradict those Texts of Scripture, which speak of all Christians judging in religious Matters, which is proof sufficient against it, unless with those that think the Scripture may contradict it self. Since no Scripture can be produc'd, where an infallible Judge is constituted, how absurd must it be to argue from Reason for one, as some do,
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who think that God has not otherwise sufficiently provided for the Welfare of Believers? But has not God done this, in giving a perfect Rule of Faith and Manners, so clearly revealing all that is necessary to be known and done in order to Salvation, that every Person sincerely desirous of happiness, may without much difficulty perceive the same, if he will consult this Rule? Is not an infallible Rule, that is clear in all necessary matters, as conducive to the Welfare of God's People, as an infallible Judge? And what tho' there be different apprehensions amongst Christians, in Matters not Essential, may they not, notwithstanding such different apprehensions, unite together in true Love and Affection? nay, do not these different apprehensions give an opportunity for exercising the Graces of mutual Forbearance and Charity? Where's the necessity then of an infallible Judge, to determine the right Sense in all Points of Religion? As for those that say, we shou'd submit to the Judgment of the Church, acquiesce in all her Determinations, and *believe as she believes*, it is sufficient to say, that it is not easy to apprehend what is meant by the Church; whether hereby we are to understand the Church representative, consisting of Ministers; or the Church represented, made up of the People; or the particular Church establish'd in the Country where our Lot happens to be cast; but certain it is, the Church, in none of these Senses, can be said to be invested with an infallible Authority. Shall we say this, either of the Church representative, or that represented, when both the one and the other are made up of fallible Men? Shall we say this of the particular Churches establish'd in particular Countries? how can we, whilst there are different Persuasions maintained by Churches

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 establish'd in different Countries, unless contradictory Tenets may be supposed to be true, and that Persons in different Countries lie under obligation to yield their assent to these contradictory Sentiments? If *by believing as the Church believes*, we intend this of a particular Church establish'd, in this or that Country, then in one Country Christians would be oblig'd to be of the Romish Persuasion, in another of the Protestant; in one Country to embrace the Sentiments of *Luther*, in another those of *Calvin*; in one Country to be Episcopalians, in another Presbyterians. Or if *by believing as the Church believes*, we intend this of the Catholick Church disseminated through the several parts of Christendom, then the very same Persons must be oblig'd to entertain contradictory Sentiments at the same time; he must be oblig'd, for instance, to believe the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, and not to believe it; he must be oblig'd to believe the Doctrine of Consubstantiation, and not to believe it; he must be oblig'd to believe the Doctrine of Absolute Decrees, and not to believe it; he must be oblig'd to believe Diocesan Government by Bishops to be the best Form of Government in the Christian World, and not to believe it, &c. all which is absurd. Granting that the Church is styl'd *the Pillar and Ground of Truth*, tho' this is not certain, since this may as properly refer to the words following, as to the Church, 1 *Tim.* 3. 15. but granting this, what does this prove? Not that the Church is the Foundation on which Truth is built, and which giveth it Authority; Truth being, saith *St. Chrysostom*, τὸ ἐκκλησίας σῦλος καὶ ἐδραῖωμα, the Pillar and Ground of the Church, which is, saith the Apostle, *built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets*, Ephes. 2. 19. but as she helps to conserve the

the saving Truths of Christ, just as a Pillar helps to sustain its Edifice; it is Essential to her very Being to teach the necessary Truths of the Gospel, and by teaching these, she prevents their being lost in the World. If there were no Professors of the Doctrine, which is according to Godliness, *i. e.* no Church of Christ, this Doctrine must necessarily disappear and vanish from amongst Men.

Sect. 4. 4. Obj. The Scripture is not of private Interpretation, 2 Pet. 1. 19. *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of private Interpretation.*

Ans. It is very alien from the Mind of the Apostle, in this place, to think that he would have Christians submit to the authoritative Interpretations of any fallible Men, and not interpret the Scriptures according to their own Sense or Judgments. If the word *ἑρμηνεία*, here translated *Interpretation*, signifies, as some Criticks say it does, *Incitation* or *Impulse*, why may not the Phrase here import, that Prophecy is not of private impulse or incitation, *i. e.* Prophecy comes not from the Prophet's own suggestion, but from the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost: which Sense perfectly agrees with what immediately follows, *ψ. 21. For prophecy came not in old time by the Will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* But taking *ἑρμηνεία* to signify Interpretation, according as it is here translated, when the Apostle tells us, that no Prophecy is of private Interpretation; the Context leads us to understand such an Interpretation, as suits a Man's own private fancy, in opposition to the Sense which the Spirit of God reveals in Scripture: The Apostle shews, that the Prophecies that went before Christ

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Christ were illustrated by the Gospel, which he compares to Light; now, says he, these Prophecies are not of private Interpretation, they are not to be explain'd according to People's private Fancies, according to the Fancies of the unbelieving *Jews*, but according to the Revelation made of them in the Gospel by the Holy Spirit, who led the Apostles into the true Sense of them, which Sense of the place does very well agree with what follows, *ψ. 21. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but, &c.* As the Prophecies relating to Christ, did not depend upon the private Will and Fancies of any Man, but were inspir'd by the Holy Ghost; so the explication of them ought to be made by the same blessed Spirit, who as he formerly inspir'd the Prophets, so has reveal'd the true Sense of them to the Apostles. To infer from hence, that private Persons are not capable of understanding the Scriptures in necessary Matters, or that instead of judging of the Sense of it themselves, they must acquiesce in the Authoritative Interpretation of others, seems altogether alien from the Apostle's Design in this place. Thus have I consider'd the several Objections which might be alledg'd against the important Truth that I have been endeavouring to establish, and from what has been said, I think it is apparent, that however plausible some of them may seem to be, there are none of them but what admit of a fair Answer.

Cap. 5. I proceed to make some Reflections upon the Whole.

Sect. 1. Shou'd it not help to recommend the Christian Doctrine to us, to find the first planters of it appealing to the Judgment and Reason of Men in what they

they deliver'd to them? The Apostle Paul calls upon the *Corinthians* to use their Reason in judging of what he said to them: The *Bereaans* are highly extoll'd for examining into the Truth of those Doctrines which this Apostle instructed them in: Instead of yielding an implicit assent to what the Apostle Paul said, *They searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*, upon which account they are styl'd *more noble than those in Thessalonica*, Acts xvii. 11. Tho' the first planters of the Gospel were guided by an infallible Spirit, upon which account an implicit assent was due to the Doctrines they deliver'd, yet they call upon Persons to judge for themselves, and commend those that did it, by comparing what they taught with those Scriptures, which were own'd by them to be Divine. Now the Way and Method, which they took in this respect, does tend to recommend their Doctrines as worthy our regard and credit: Does not their appealing to the Reason and Judgment of Men, manifest a Consciousness to themselves, that there was nothing absurd or unreasonable in what they propos'd, nothing but what would stand the Test of every Man's sober and impartial Judgment? Those that instead of appealing to the Reason and Judgment of Men, as to what they deliver, insist upon a blind implicit assent to all their Dictates, give that ground of suspicion, with regard to the Doctrines they teach, which it is manifest the Writers of the Gospel never did. We have reason to suspect those Doctrines to be absurd and unscriptural, which the maintainers of them are not willing others should exercise their Reason about, and compare with Scripture; but this ground of suspicion was not given by the first planters of Christianity, who as they frankly appeal'd to the Judgment of every Man

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Man, with respect to what they deliver'd, so extol'd those that compar'd the Doctrines they taught with the Scriptures then in being. Now may it not recommend the Doctrines of Christianity, if there appear nothing in them repugnant to the Reason of Mankind, nothing but what will bear the Test of every Man's sober and impartial Judgment? It will doubtless, with all but those that think it no discredit to a Divine Revelation, that it should contain Doctrines in themselves absurd and ridiculous to the Reason of Mankind.

Seet. 2. 2. Have we not reason to be thankful, that we are in those Circumstances wherein we enjoy the liberty of judging for our selves in religious Matters? As every Christian has an undoubted Right to judge for himself, so it is a great Mercy, not to be restrain'd in the exercise of so valuable a Right, as Multitudes have been and are at this Day: This is the unhappy case of Multitudes dwelling in Popish Countries, where they are not permitted to make the best use they can of those Scriptures, which were given us by God, for the direction of our Consciences in all Matters of Faith, and the regulation of our Practice in all Matters of Duty; where instead of being permitted the free use of the Scriptures, comparing all Matters of Religion herewith, and giving their assent accordingly, they are depriv'd of this free use, and oblig'd to yield an implicit assent to whatever Sense others are pleas'd to put upon these Divine Writings, and the Doctrines they are taught by Men, whether they apprehend them agreeable with these Sacred Writings or no: Thus do they of that Church invade the Rights of Christians, and exercise a Spiritual Tyranny over the Souls and Consciences of Men. Now is it not a Mercy,

cy, that merits our thankfulness, to be freed from a Tyranny of this kind? A Tyranny that cannot but appear very grievous to all considering Persons, that have a regard for Religion, and the Rights of Christians, to judge for themselves in the Matters of this kind; to all who prefer a clear well grounded persuasion in these Matters, to a blind implicit assent to fallible Creatures herein. What a Mercy is it then, that our Lot is cast rather in a Protestant than a Popish Country? That it is cast where, as we have the free use of Scripture, so we may compare all Matters of Religion herewith, and give our assent accordingly, without incurring the hazard of undergoing all the Miseries of a Popish Inquisition? It is certain, we are not so restrain'd in the exercise of this valuable Right, as they are, whose Lot is cast under Popish Establishments, which is certainly matter of thankfulness to that God who fixes the Bounds of our Habitation, and it would still be matter of greater thankfulness, the less any were restrain'd in the exercise of so unquestionable a Right.

Sect. 3. 3. Is it not unscriptural as well as absurd, for any to decry the use of Reason in Matters of Religion? How is it possible for any, without the use of this Faculty, to Form any Judgment in Divine Matters? If it belongs therefore to every Man to do this, it doubtless belongs to every Man to make use of this Faculty in religious Matters. It is this Faculty that renders us capable Subjects of Religion; how strange must it be to divest ourselves of the use of it in Matters of Religion? In case indeed it were needless for some to form any Judgments at all in these Matters, or were these Matters entirely to depend upon the Judgment of others, I must own there would be the

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less occasion for every Man's exercising this Faculty in religious Matters; but since both these Suppositions are destroy'd, by its being every Man's Right and Duty to judge for himself in these Matters, it certainly concerns every Man, one as well as another, to exercise his Reason in these Matters; without the exercise whereof, as Persons may believe any thing, be it never so absurd, so how is it possible for them to find out the genuine Sense of Scripture, or to distinguish betwixt Truth and Error, or to render God any thing of a *reasonable Service*, which yet all Christians are requir'd to do, one as well as another? It is absurd in any to decry the use of Reason in religious Matters; tho' more absurd in some than others; more absurd in the Protestant than the Papist, since the former, if true to his Principles, allows to all Christians a Right to judge for themselves in these Matters, which the latter denies. When I say Persons should use their Reason in Matters of Religion, I do not mean, that every Man's private Reason should be the Rule and Standard of his Judgment in these Matters; this is already supposed to be that Divine Revelation contain'd in the Scriptures of Truth; but Reason is the Faculty whereby he may and ought to judge concerning the Sense of those Things that are contain'd in this Rule; and tho' he is not presently to reject what may be attended with some Difficulties, which surpass the Sense of his Reason to account for, yet he is not to admit any Doctrines that are in their nature contradictory and repugnant to Reason; if he were, to what purpose is he to use his Reason, since the end of this is to distinguish betwixt Truth and Falshood, and nothing can be true that contradicts right Reason? No such
Doctrines

Doctrines therefore as does this, can be contain'd in the *Scripture of Truth*, the Rule about which he is to exercise this Faculty. To suppose that the Scriptures contain in them Doctrines contradictory to Reason, is to suppose they contain falshood in them, since whatever is so is false; nay, since these are allow'd by Christians to contain a Divine Revelation, to suppose such a thing, is to suppose the blessed God contradicting himself, since he is the Author of Reason also: Now certain it is we cannot be surer that the Scriptures do contain a Divine Revelation, and are a Rule of Faith and Manners to us, than that if they are so, they cannot contain what is false, or than, that it is impossible the blessed God, the Author of the two Lights of Reason and Revelation, should contradict himself. In short the Scripture, and not every ones private Reason, is the Rule of a Christian's Judgment in religious Matters; however, every Christian ought to use his Reason to judge of the Sense of this Rule; and if so, he ought not to admit any Sense of Texts that is in its nature repugnant and contradictory to Reason.

Sect. 4. 4. May not those be said to act an unchristian part, who wrest this Right of judging for themselves, out of the hands of their fellow Christians, by undertaking to judge for them in religious Matters? How criminal they of the Church of Rome are, in this respect, has been again and again hinted; but it is too apparent to all that look abroad into the Christian World, that they are not alone guilty in this Matter. May not those be said to undertake to judge for others, and consequently to wrest from them the Right they have to judge for themselves, who demand their assent to Doctrines and Articles of

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Religion, when they cannot tell whether those, upon whom they make this demand, judge them to be agreeable to the Rule of God's Word? Their judging them to be agreeable hereto, who make this Demand, is no just Reason for the same, unless they have a Right to judge for those upon whom they make it, and consequently their making this Demand is an apparent laying Claim to such a Right. In case I assent to any Doctrines, because upon comparing them with the Scriptures, I find them to agree with this perfect Rule of Faith and Manners, I may be said, in this case, to judge for my self. Again, May not those be said to assume this Right of judging for others, in Matters of Religion, who wou'd oblige their fellow Christians to admit the particular Sense which they affix, to any Texts of Scripture? Christians cannot be said to have a Right to judge for themselves, in religious Concerns, unless they have a Right to judge with regard to the Sense of Scripture, which it is manifest they have not, if others have a Right to determine this for them, and they oblig'd to submit to their Determination in this Matter. Those that undertake to do this, do manifestly assume a Right of judging for others, and in so doing do act an unchristian part: However Christian a part it is to explain and give the Sense of Scripture; it is manifestly the quite contrary, to do this in an authoritative manner, so as to oblige others to yield their assent to such a Sense and Explication put upon it by fallible Creatures. Once more, may not they be said to assume this Right of judging for other, who would oblige others to admit of Words and Phrases different from those contain'd in Scripture? If these Words and Phrases are of a different Sense, Import and Signification from those contain'd in Scripture, is it not apparent, that in

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obliging others to these, they do oblige them to admit their particular Sense of Scripture, which is certainly undertaking to judge for them, and depriving them of exercising their undoubted Right of judging for themselves? If these Words and Phrases are exactly of the same Import, Sense and Signification with those in Scripture, if they signify neither more nor less, what an absurdity must it be to substitute others in their room, and oblige others to their use? Doubtless Persons may, in explaining the Sense of Scripture, use different Words and Phrases from those contain'd in it; this is what all Parties of Christians have done and do, but certainly none can oblige others to the use of these different Words and Phrases, without either assuming a Right to judge for them, or acting absurdly: If these different Words and Phrases do no way fix and determine the Sense of Scripture, how absurdly do they act, that not being content with their fellow Christians using Scripture Words and Phrases, substitute these in their room? In case on the other hand they do fix and determine the Sense of Scripture, it is very apparent, that in obliging others to the use of them, instead of leaving them at liberty to judge for themselves, concerning the Sense of Scripture, they undertake to judge for them; this they apparently do, tho' it be granted, that the Sense they affix to Scripture, by the use of these different Words, be the true Sense: But certainly, let Persons understand the Sense of Scripture never so truly, this will by no means justify their assuming a Right, which does by no means belong to them, and invading the undoubted Right which every Christian has, of judging for himself, concerning the Sense of Scripture; nay, this could not be justified, tho' it should be granted

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granted that they could use apter Expressions to convey the Sense of Scripture, than those divinely inspir'd Persons who wrote the Scriptures, which yet methinks it would be not a little arrogant in any Christians to pretend, and if so, why must their Expressions, their Words and Phrases, be substituted in the room of those contain'd in Scripture? There is no necessity at all of doing this, if the Words and Phrases of Scripture are insufficient to convey the Sense of Scripture, which if they are not, how came any to know the Sense of Scripture? How came they to know it, who are for substituting other Words and Phrases, in order to express it? It must be own'd therefore, that the Words of Scripture are sufficient to convey the Sense of Scripture, tho' I readily own they are not sufficient to convey the determin'd Sense which some Men have affix'd to Scripture in some cases; but those that upon this account do substitute other Words in their room, and wou'd oblige others to their use, do manifestly undertake to judge for others, with regard to the Sense of Scripture. In these several respects have others, besides those of the Church of *Rome*, undertaken to judge for their fellow Christians, and if what has been said, touching it's being every Christians Right and Duty to judge for himself be true, so far as they have done it, they may be said to have acted an unchristian part. These Persons that thus wrest from others a Right to judge for themselves, do in effect lay claim to a Spirit of Infallibility, whereof they can give no Proof, and no Authority over the Consciences of Men, which they have not the least Right to.

Seet. 5. 5. What can be more reasonable than that Christians, instead of persecuting their fellow Christians, for different Sentiments in religious Matters, should exercise mutual Charity and Forbearance one towards another upon these Accounts? Persecution, upon a religious Account, is utterly inconsistent with that Right which all Christians have to judge for themselves in religious Matters: Those that persecute others for their religious Sentiments, do manifestly undertake to judge for them in Matters of this kind, and so invade the Right these have to judge for themselves; this is certainly done by all that make use either of wholesome Severities, or negative Discouragements, in order to bring their Fellow Christians to the same Persuasion with themselves in Matters of a religious Nature. If a Right to judge for themselves in religious Matters, be the Fundamental Principle of Protestants, what an inconsistent and self-contradictory part do all those Protestants act, who persecute others upon a religious Account? How much more absurdly do they act than they of the Church of Rome, in persecuting others on this Account, who deny it to be every Christian's Right to judge for himself in these Matters? Persecution, for differences of Opinion in religious Matters, is both inconsistent with this Right, and also repugnant to the Genius of that holy Religion, which obliges its Professors to be as Sheep, not as Wolves one to another; to bear the Cross themselves, rather than to inflict it on their fellow Christians: It is utterly inconsistent with all those Laws of Love, Charity, and mutual Forbearance, which the Gospel requires Christians to observe, and to the observance whereof, a Right in Christians to judge for themselves in religious Matters, is a strong Argument. Is it not,
upon

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upon this Principle, very unreasonable for Christians to judge, censure, and condemn each other, for their different Sentiments in religious Matters? Granting this Principle, which has been sufficiently prov'd, it is unavoidable but Christians will, in many cases, judge differently one from another, and upon the same Principle one has no more Right, to judge, censure, and condemn another, for his different Sentiment, than that other has to judge, censure, and condemn him. If one Man has no Right to *judge for another*, in religious Matters, what Right can he be suppos'd to have to judge him for his Sentiments in these Matters? This Right belongs to him, and to him alone, to whom the Consciences of Men are subject; *Who art thou*, says the Apostle, *that judgest another man's servant, to his own master he standeth or falleth*, Rom. xiv. 4. How criminal must they be who, by judging their fellow Christians, may be said to invade the Province of that one Lawgiver, who as he has the sole Right of giving Laws to the Consciences of Men, so is alone *able to save and to destroy*? Since God is the sole Master, to whom every Christian must *e're long stand or fall*, how criminal must they be, who take upon them to pronounce Sentences of Condemnation, with regard to their fellow Servants, for their different apprehensions in religious Matters? I cannot forbear, upon this occasion, mentioning a History, which Mr. *Basnage* in his * History of the *Jews* relates, concerning a Musulman Prince, which may serve as a Lecture to many Christians who decide of the eternal Destiny of Persons entertaining different Sentiments

* Lib. 7. Cap. 2.

from them, with the same Authority as if it were at their disposal. Omar the Second having abolish'd some Curses that were wont to be pronounc'd against the *Alides* (a Sect among the Mahometans, so denominated from their following *Aly*) and substituted these words, full of Charity, in their room, *Pardon us, Lord, and pardon also our Brethren, who make profession of the same Faith with us*; a certain Lord would have carried him farther, and have obliged him to curse the *Ommiades* (a different Sect among the Mahometans) instead of the *Alides*, and the easier to obtain his Demands, rebell'd against him; but the *Caliph* sent Deputies to desire a Conference, in order to know, whether his Design was to reform the Government or Religion, but signifying, that he wou'd never curse his Ancestors and Relations, because it was a great Sin to determine what relates to the other Life, and that God never gave command for the cursing any body. Does not the Charity of this Mahometan Prince deserve the Consideration of those Professors of Christianity, who are so forward to pronounce Anathemas upon their fellow Professors, for their different Sentiments in some religious Matters? Since Christians are accountable to God, and not to each other, for their religious Sentiments, how absurd and unchristian is it to judge and condemn each other on these Accounts? But why dost thou judge thy brother, or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, Rom. xiv. 10. To the same effect the Apostle speaks, Cap. xiv. 12, 13. So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God, let us not therefore judge one another any more. This judging one another, as it contradicts that Right which every Man has to judge for himself, and

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implies an arrogant assuming to judge for others in religious Matters; so it is quite opposite to that Love, Charity and Forbearance, which Christians are again and again call'd in the Gospel to exercise towards each other, and which indeed there is all the reason in the World Christians should exercise towards each other, notwithstanding their different Sentiments in religious Matters: The Agreement there is amongst Christians in things of the greatest and most valuable Importance, is a greater Argument for the Exercise of these Divine Graces towards each other, than their different Sentiments are for a Temper and Behaviour contradictory hereto; which as they often owe themselves to different Capacities, Genius's and Means which different Persons enjoy, so they are commonly about Matters comparatively trifling, obscure, and difficult. Why should these Differences occasion a Breach of Affection amongst Christians, all of whom are liable to err, and none of whom have any Authority over the Faith and Conscience of another? The Apostle presses Christians of different Sentiments, to a mutual embracing each other; *One says, he believeth that he may eat all things, another who is weak eateth Herbs; let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth,* Rom. xiv. 2, 3. It is evident, that the Apostle instead of allowing a Right in some Christians to judge for others, and obliging others to submit to their Determination, allows each to entertain their different persuasion, and presses to a mutual forbearance. How much wou'd this Advice tend to the Happiness of Christians if duly regarded by them? As methinks it shou'd be, since it is in its nature so reasonable, upon the Principle I have

have been endeavouring to establish, and besides, comes from the Mouth of an inspir'd Person.

Seet. 6. 6. and lastly. Should not all Christians assert the Right they have to judge for themselves in religious Concerns, and use their best endeavours to judge aright herein? Seeing we have a Rule clear in all necessary Matters; seeing we are reasonable Creatures, and so capable of judging in religious Matters; seeing we are Christians, and as such requir'd to judge herein; seeing we are Protestants, and as such profess this Principle; seeing we are accountable Creatures, and as such are oblig'd to act conformably to this Principle; seeing an implicit assent to the Judgment of others is, upon so many accounts, absurd and unreasonable, as because none have a Right to judge for others in these Matters; since none are infallible, and none are invested with Authority over the Consciences of others; because the Judgments of Men are so various in these Matters, and finally, because we are requir'd not to give an implicit assent to the Doctrines of Men, by him that has an unquestionable Authority over the Consciences of Men: I say, seeing Matters are thus, does it not highly concern us and all Christians, instead of blindly submitting to the Determinations of Men, in Matters of Religion, to assert the Right we have to judge for our selves in these Matters? Does it not highly concern us to enquire into the Sense of that unerring Rule which God has given us, to bring all Matters of Religion to it, in order to be examin'd by it, and to yield our assent to Doctrines, according as we find them to be contain'd in it, or agreeable to it? How much more reasonable, and more for our Interest is it thus to act, than

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to enslave our Judgments to the Opinions of Men, all of whom are fallible, and none of whom have any Authority over the Consciences of others? But then as it concerns every Christian to assert his Right, in this particular, so it concerns him to be very cautious of abusing this his Right, by his using his best endeavours to judge aright in these Matters: Seeing these are Matters that respect our eternal State in another Life, and our Sentiments with respect to them, are to direct and influence our Actions in this Life, we cannot certainly be too careful in our endeavours to form a right Judgment in these Matters. However candid and favourable the Great Judge of quick and dead, we may suppose, will be, with regard to any involuntary Mistakes and Errors, which any sincere Searchers after Truth may have fallen into, yet doubtless we must be accountable to him for those Mistakes and Errors which owe themselves to a faulty neglect of using Endeavours in order to get our Judgments rectify'd and inform'd. It concerns us therefore, to endeavour the best we can, to form a right Judgment in the important Matters of Religion: We are indeed to judge for our selves in these Matters, but this does by no means denote, that we are to judge hereof according to our own particular Fancies and Inclinations. The Scriptures are the Rule whereby we are to judge, by examining into its true Sense; and that is not always the true Sense, which is hastily taken up, or may be agreeable to a private Person's Fancy and Inclination, but that which is consentaneous to the Will of its Divine Author. Then do we judge aright in religious Matters, when we apprehend the true Sense of Scripture, that Sense which is agreeable to the Will of its Author: Now in order to our
thus

thus judging aright, in these Matters, several Directions might be given; I shall conclude this Discourse, with hinting at a few; as particularly, in order to our forming a right Judgment, *Let us, with sincere and unprejudiced Minds, consult this Divine Rule:*

*Directions
for judging
aright.*

Then are we likely to come to the Knowledge of those Truths that are contain'd in Scripture, when sincerely, and with Minds purg'd of all Prejudice, we seek after the same; when we seek rather to draw our religious Sentiments from thence, than come to those divine Oracles, with preconceived Opinions, in order to hunt for Arguments there to support them. Again, in order hereto, *Let us, in an humble and self diffident manner, implore the help of God's Holy Spirit.* Tho' it is doubtless every Christians Duty to use his Reason and Understanding, in judging of Divine Matters, yet he ought not to be unmindful of the Wise Man's Advice, of *not leaning to his own Understanding.* Persons are never more likely to make mistaken Judgment in religious Matters, than when they lean hereto with a disregard of the gracious Aids of God's Holy Spirit, to whose Office it belongs to guide and rectify the Judgment, and to lead the Disciples of *Jesus* into all saving Truth; wou'd we therefore judge aright in the things of God, instead of confiding too much in our own Strength; let us, with humility of Soul, implore at his Hands, the enlightning influences of that blessed Spirit, which he has promis'd to give to them that ask, *Luke xi. 13.* Again, in order hereto, *let us see that we be sincerely dispos'd to do God's holy Will.* A sincere disposition of this kind is a good qualification, with regard to the forming a right Judgment in religious Matters, and is also a means of

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of interesting Persons in the Favour and Blessing of that God, who questionless will preserve all those in whom it is found, from all Errors of a destructive nature, and fatal consequence: *If any man, says our Saviour, will do the will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self,* John vii. 17. *The secret of the Lord, says the Psalmist, is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his Covenant,* Psalm xxv. 14. And if so, can we think that Persons sincerely dispos'd to do the Divine Will, shall be suffer'd to continue ignorant of any saving Truth, or fall into any destructive Error? Once more, (because it does not consist with the Design of this Discourse, to multiply particular Directions, in order to Persons judging aright; and I only propos'd to hint at a few that might be of general use) in order to this End, *Let us exert due care and diligence in consulting this Rule, in order to find out its genuine Sense:* Forasmuch as many Words and Phrases carry in them a different Sense, when consider'd separately by themselves, from what they do when consider'd in a connected Discourse, where they bear a Relation to somewhat going before and following after; in order to the finding out the genuine Sense of the Divine Writings, we cannot too heedfully attend to the Scope and Design of the Sacred Penmen, in any particular Parts of Scripture, by a due regard had to the Context: Through the neglect of this, a great many Texts of Scripture have had a quite different Sense affix'd to them than what was intended by the Divine Author. How easy a thing is it to mistake the Sense of an Author, if some single scraps of his Writings be consider'd separately by themselves, without any regard had to what they were connected with, to what went before and follows after?

after? And as in order to find out the genuine Sense of Scripture, we cannot too heedfully attend to the Scope of the Sacred Penmen, so we cannot be too resolute in not admitting such a Sense of any particular Texts as contradicts the general Scope and Tenor of their Writings, or is really repugnant to the Reason of Men: Whatever contradicts the one, or is repugnant to the other, is certainly false, and whatever is false, we may be sure can be no Branch of a Divine Revelation; cannot proceed from a God of Truth.

F I N I S.



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